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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an investigation of the association between similarity of interests and likability in a manner as nearly comparable as possible to earlier attitude and personality research. The finding of a strong, positive relationship between similarity of interests and likability would be significant for two reasons. First, it would represent an extension of the similarity-attraction hypothesis, so important in personality research, to the field of vocational behavior. Second, positive findings would provide further support for Halland's theory of vocational choice by testing the validity of some of its assumptions. When results were compared directly with previous research concerning the effects of similarity of attitudes or personality on likability, a strong positive relationship was found between interest similarity and rated attraction. The implications of these findings for a major theory of vocational behavior are discussed. (Author)

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AN EXTENSION OF THE SIMILARITY-ATTRACTION HYPOTHESIS TO THE STUDY OF VOCATIONAL BEHAVIOR

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INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

The Center for Social Organization of Schools has two primary objectives: to develop a scientific knowledge of how schools affect their students, and to use this knowledge to develop better school practices and organization.

The Center works through five programs to achieve its objectives. The Academic Games program has developed simulation games for use in the classroom, and is studying the processes through which games teach and evaluating the effects of games on student learning. The Social Accounts program is examining how a student's education affects his actual occupational attainment, and how education results in different vocational outcomes for blacks and whites. The Talents and Competencies program is studying the effects of educational experience on a wide range of human talents, competencies and personal dispositions, in order to formulate -- and research -- important educational goals other than traditional academic achievement. The School Organization program is currently concerned with the effects of student participation in social and educational decision making, the structure of competition and cooperation, formal reward systems, ability-grouping in schools, effects of school quality, and applications of expectation theory in the schools. The Careers and Curricula program bases its work upon a theory of career development. It has developed a self-administered vocational guidance device to promote vocational development and to foster satisfying curricular decisions for high school, college, and adult populations.

This report, prepared for the Careers and Curricula program, examines the relationship between similarity of interests and friendship choices. The results support several assumptions in Holland's theory of vocational choice.

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between similarity of interests and likability. The method used was such that the results could be compared directly with previous research concerning the effects of similarity of attitudes or personality on likability. A strong (eta_{av} = .81) positive relationship was found between interest similarity and rated attraction. The implications of these findings for a major theory of vocational behavior were discussed.

Introduction

Holland's (1959, 1966) theory of vocational choice rests on several assumptions about interpersonal attraction. He assumes, for instance, that people are motivated to search for, and remain in, environments which are compatible with their personalities, thereby implying that the company of similar others is sufficiently rewarding to cause us to seek them out. Holland further suggests that both vocational satisfaction and achievement depend on a congruency between one's personality and the largely interpersonal environment in which one works. This statement implies that we like people who are similar to us in terms of vocational skills and interests. Thus the validity of Holland's theory is partially dependent on the empirical results of interpersonal attraction research.

Stimulated by the work of Newcomb (1956), personality theorists have collected a large amount of data concerning the dynamics of interpersonal attraction. This research has dealt primarily with the effect of similarity of attitudes, or personality, on likability. The relationship between similarity of interests and likability has not been studied in a direct and explicit fashion.

This paper presents an investigation of the association between similarity of interests and likability in a manner as nearly comparable as possible to earlier attitude and personality research. The finding of a strong, positive relationship between similarity of interests and likability would be significant for two reasons. First, it would represent an extension of the similarity-attraction hypothesis, so

important in personality research, to the field of vocational behavior. Second, positive findings would provide further support for Holland's theory of vocational choice by testing the validity of some of its assumptions.

Method

Interest measure.

Holland's (1966) classification of the interest domain provides a guide for sampling interests systematically. Holland suggests that interests can be sorted into six categories: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional. These categories are usually defined by Holland's (1965) Vocational Preference Inventory. However, in order to provide a task with maximum relevance to our subjects, thirty activity preference items were specially written (e. g. playing chess, going to parties, attending plays) to represent each of Holland's categories; thus there were five items for each category. Five response options were provided for each item, ranging from enjoying the activity very much, to disliking the activity very much. Table 1 shows the preference items and their assignment to Holland types.

Procedure.

To insure that this research was comparable to those investigations which used attitude and personality similarity as independent variables, Byrne's (1961) procedure was replicated as closely as possible. The specially developed interest measure described above was given to 210 male students in a personality theory course at The

Table 1

Activity Preference Items Grouped According to

Holland's Categories

Realistic

Browsing in a hardware store
Reading Sports Illustrated magazine
Building a stereo set
Restoring an antique automobile
Visiting a livestock exhibit

Investigative

Playing chess
Reading Scientific American magazine
Attending a rocket launch
Conducting laboratory research
Solving mathematical or mechanical puzzles

Artistic

Going to a symphony concert
Attending a play
Visiting an art museum
Writing a poem
Drawing or painting a picture

Social

Going to parties
Working as a camp counselor
Ghetto tutoring
Serving in the Peace Corps
Meeting new people

Enterprising

Bargaining
Directing an international corporation
Following the stock market
Running a political campaign
Participating in competitive activities

Conventional

Writing computer programs
Having regular hours for work
Reading business methods magazines
Planning and following a budget
Planning a club outing

Johns Hopkins University. The answer sheets were collected and sorted randomly into three groups. The answer sheets for each group were then used to prepare a special answer sheet or stimulus for each student. Students in Group I received answer sheets which precisely agreed with their own; answer sheets for Group II contained responses of which half were in precise agreement and half were in extreme disagreement with their own responses, and answer sheets for Group III were designed to disagree as completely as possible with the student's own responses.

Four weeks after the interest questionnaire was administered, the special answer sheets were distributed to the class. Students were told they had been given the answer sheet of another person in the class as part of a study in social perception. They were asked to examine the interest questionnaire closely in order to make certain judgments about the person who had filled it out.

Interpersonal attraction.

An abbreviated version of the rating scale used by Byrne (1961) served as a measure of interpersonal attraction. Subjects were asked to indicate, along a seven point scale: (1) "How well do you think you would like this person?" (2) "How well adjusted do you think this person is?" and (3) "How much do you think you would enjoy working with this person?" Items (1) and (3) are indices of interpersonal attraction; (2) is a comparison measure of simple evaluation.

Results

As a result of attrition, 122 students completed the entire procedure -- 44 in Group I, 42 in Group II, and 36 in Group III. Three one-way analyses of variance were computed comparing the groups on each of the three rating scales. The results of these analyses, shown in Table 2, clearly indicate that the degree to which students expect to like unknown persons, and evaluate them positively, is strongly related to the similarity of their interests.

Table 2

Comparison of Attraction and Evaluation Across Three Levels of Similarity of Interest

Rating Scale	Group Means			F	p	Eta
	I	II	III			
1. Likability	5.7	4.1	2.1	119.4	.001	.82
2. Adjustment	4.0	3.4	2.1	18.4	.001	.48
3. Work compatibility	5.6	3.6	2.0	118.6	.001	.79

Note. Group I, N = 44; Group II, N = 42; Group III, N = 36

A post-hoc comparison among means revealed that, for rating scales one and three, all differences between means were significant ($p < .01$). For scale number two (Adjustment), the difference between Group I and II was non-significant, while differences between Groups I and III, and II and III, were significant at the .01 level.

Discussion

The results in Table 2 indicate that the relationship between similarity of interests and interpersonal attraction is roughly of the same magnitude as that found between attitude similarity and rated attraction (cf. Byrne, 1961). These results lend support to the assumptions noted earlier that people "search" for, and tend to remain in, work environments populated by others like themselves (Holland, 1966). In view of the unusual stability of interest scores over time (Campbell, 1971), the findings may also have other practical significance; i. e., friendships based on shared interests should be durable. The nature of the experimental task itself suggests that the results are reasonable. That is, it is relatively simple to construct a mental image of a person who enjoys playing chess, solving mathematical puzzles, reading Scientific American, and doing laboratory research, and the degree to which we think we might like this person can be quickly estimated.

The results found here were predicted by Newcomb in his original paper: The first condition "... under which continued interaction between the same persons is most likely, and under which, therefore, the possibilities of continued reciprocal reward are the greatest.. .is the possession of common interests, apart from themselves, that require interdependent behavior" (1956, p. 576).

The writers prefer to explain these results in terms of role theory, according to which each person's goal in interpersonal relations is to maximize the amount of positive, friendly attention he receives, while minimizing censure. Over time, people develop repertoires of roles and

performances designed to gain the approval and/or avoid the disapproval of others. In most cases, however, one does not seek the approval of "people in general." Rather, we reserve our best performances for carefully chosen audiences -- persons who are competent to judge our presentations. Thus a big game hunter is more concerned with judgments of his work by other hunters than by rug salesmen, while psychologists care primarily about the opinions of other psychologists. If another person shares our interests, then we can expect him to provide a proper audience for our performance, applauding in the right places, asking "penetrating" questions which permit us to further reveal our expertise, while not embarassing us by inquiring about "professional" secrets.

Thus, it is empirically the case that interest similarity is related to interpersonal attraction. This finding is predictable on the basis of Holland's theory of vocational choice, role theory, Newcomb's theory of interpersonal relations, and from common observation. While this seems to be an incongruous combination of conceptual viewpoints, the fact that they agree on such a substantial empirical relationship suggests the presence of other similar underlying patterns. The next question toward which attention might be turned concerns the relationship between personality, attitudes, and interests. A proper analysis of these interconnections might materially advance our knowledge of the dynamics of interpersonal attraction and the choice of work groups.

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